

The Perfect Library

For Carolyn Clink

After Patrick O'Leary's *The Perfect City*

Imagine, if you will, a perfect library
where the reading room is lit by the soft
pulsing lights of fireflies & the wood that furnishes it
is from exquisite trees felled by mountain men
with bulging biceps.

Where you can find the fold-out book of universes
& newspapers including *The Barsoom Evening Post*,
The Fanciful Times of London, *The Atlantis Monthly*.

Where you can find dictionaries of made up words,
the histories and alternate histories
of things that never happened,
the book of extinctions & lost civilizations,
the book of the living, the book of the dead,
the book of the living dead.

Where the reference desk is staffed by ancient librarians
with leathery wings who can tell you about the Big Bang
& everything since because they were there.

A perfect library where the books read other books
& join book clubs, arguing what they're about,
& when they're done they shelve themselves.

Where you can find books smaller than a fingernail
& larger than a bus.

Where the listening room has pillow headphones

handed out by flapper girls sporting steampunk goggles
so you can hear the music mountains make,
the pent up frustration of dormant volcanoes,
the budding awareness of spring moss growing
on the sides of trees, the stirring of the planets.
The perfect library where documentaries are available
in a screening room with reclining bucket seats
& fresh-popped buttered popcorn & drinks are served
by male models wearing gladiator & toreador costumes.
Where the photocopiers never run out of toner,
paper, or patience & never break down.
Where the carpets are cleaned by pilot fish
taking a break from *Shark Week*. Where bathrooms
are hands free & faeries use the pressed leaves
from gilded books to fan your hands dry.
Where the map room has an infinite number of maps
& old sea serpents using walkers gingerly slip
from the canvasses to lead library tours.
Where the archives & special collections contain books
that have turned to dust & patrons are asked
to wear white gloves & to refrain from sneezing.
Where people in the quiet room can hear the building settle.
I have not mentioned the mermaid swing,
the petting zoo of extinct species, the corridors
where classic lines float through the air like balloon help,
the *2,000 Years of Cement* exhibit,
the crystal conveyor belt made from the wishes of children
that appears out of mid-air, bringing the books you want,
the dungeon of dead technologies,

the wall of human existence,
the glass tube ride through the sunken city.
This *is* the library you dream about, the perfect library,
& I can see you want to go there,
you want to knock on its heavy oak doors & say, *Let me in!*
& if you finally find yourself there
you will discover the perfect place,
past the reading room of exquisite wood & fireflies,
past the guided tour, the swing, the dungeon,
past the gladiators & toreadors & flapper girls
to the place where you have a view on the garden,
the natural light finding its way in,
& there, in a glass case, you will find
the first library card you were issued,
the first book you signed out as a child,
& you are there with your parents again,
the place where you could barely see over the counter
& you are glad you finally have a chance to thank them
for taking you to your first library,
the perfect library,
& you realize, this is where you have been,
all along.

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